

Chapter 3

Through the Maze: the Wagner Lineages in Kronach

Our branch of the Wagner family stems from the city of Kronach in northern Bavaria, which is just below the border with Saxony. There are two major sources of information for the early history of our family in Kronach. The old Catholic church books, which contain the original records for marriages, baptisms, and deaths in Kronach from the 1600s to the 1800s, are available on microfiche at the Archbishop's Archive in Bamberg.¹ The other important resource is the *Chronik von Kronach* (the Chronicle of Kronach), which is a six-volume compendium of documents dating back to the 1400s.² It presents extracts from the old documents, which are transliterated into modern type, along with commentaries and a detailed index. I was able to review a complete set of the Chronicle in the Kronach City Library when I visited the city in the mid-1990s.

After studying the Catholic Church books in Bamberg, I was surprised by the large number of references to persons with the Wagner surname. In other old church books that I have reviewed from various places in the Rhineland Pfalz, Baden, or Switzerland, the surname Wagner is not all that common – typically you find only a few occurrences, and it is fairly easy to trace that family in the records. In the case of Kronach, I was amazed – and rather dismayed – to find at least 225 references to the Wagner surname from 1632 (the earliest entry) through 1761! This is a conservative estimate because it was difficult to decipher handwriting in some of the earliest records from the 1600s. Also, records prior to 1648 are scarce because many of the earliest documents, including those stored in the capitol at Bamberg and in smaller villages near Kronach, were destroyed during the Thirty Years War.

¹ It should be noted that these records are not available on microfilm through the LDS church. The Archbishop's Archive in Bamberg has a library and an efficient research facility, complete with microfiche readers and photocopy machines; however, you must travel to Bamberg to view these records. Catholic church books from that era were typically written in Latin, rather than in German. This is a plus because Latin script is closer to modern, in contrast with old Gothic script used on German records.

² Georg Fehn, *Chronik von Kronach*, Kronach: Verlag Buchdruckerei und Verlags-Anstalt Carl Link. This massive compendium contains reports about early events and persons of note in the archives of Kronach. The series was apparently published from 1950 - 1972. Volume 1 does not show a date of publication but the Forward by Georg Fehn was written in 1950; Volume 4 was published in 1969; Volume 5 was published in 1971 -- it contains summaries from the Book of Offenses (criminal proceedings) and various biographical summaries; Volume 6 was published in 1972 -- it presents a chronology for the Rosenberg Castle, from 1419 to the 1800s.



The records in the church books made a distinction between whether the person resided in the *Stadt* (the “city” of Kronach, owned by the Bishop) or in the *Land* (the surrounding villages, owned by private nobility and the Holy Roman Emperor).³ The great majority of the records for the surname Wagner came from the city. There were several records for persons from nearby villages who settled in the city and became married. Some of these villages included Neuses (located about 2 miles southeast of Kronach), Knellendorf (about 2 miles north), Hasslach (about 5 miles north of Kronach, above Knellendorf), Friesen (about 2 miles northeast of Kronach), Steinmühle (the “stone mill” located on a point of land on the south side of Kronach between the Hasslach and Kronach Rivers), Zeyern

³ An example of the distinction between “Stadt” and “Land” is found in the Chronicles in the case of “Hannss” Wagner in 1656. He owned a house in Kronach and he wanted to open a beer brewery. The City Council wouldn’t allow it because he hadn’t yet become a citizen of the city. The judge ruled that since Hans was a “Landsknecht” he was an “imperial subject” and he should file his appeal at that level, rather than to the city of Kronach.

(about 5 miles east), Birken, as well as the larger city of Bamberg which was the seat of the Bishopric.

By the 18th century there were dozens of Wagner families residing in Kronach and in the surrounding villages. They ranged widely in wealth and prestige, from common tradesmen, inn-keepers, lumber-mill owners, log-raft handlers, teamsters, and the like, to some of the most influential people in the community with ties to the administration of the Prince-Bishop in the Rosenberg Castle. Neuses had an especially large cluster of Wagner families, several of whom were coopers (*Vietors*) or fabric-dyers (*Tinctors*). The profusion of families with this surname in the Kronach area suggests that their ancestors had resided there from very early times, and their families had branched over the centuries. All these Wagners may have stemmed from a common core of ancestors in the 15th century in Kronach or nearby villages, but the records don't allow any clear conclusions.

It's possible that Kronach's early importance as a strategic fortress and as a transportation hub may have played some role in the proliferation of the Wagner trade-name in this area. Massive amounts of supplies and wares passed through Kronach, which were required by the citizens and by the military garrison at Rosenberg Castle. As we have noted, Kronach was a center for the processing of lumber from the Frankenwald. Rafts of logs were floated down the Hasslach and Kronach Rivers to the city, where they were cut in water-powered sawmills and the finished lumber was then transported on wagons throughout the German speaking realms.⁴ There were at least four sawmills on the outskirts of Kronach, plus 19 sawmills in nearby villages, and a few that were privately owned by wealthy nobility who did not owe taxes to the Bishop in Bamberg.⁵ The Chronicles mention that at least one of these sawmills was owned by a Wagner family.⁶ The garrison required large amounts of lumber for fortifications and construction, which were provided by the Prince-Bishop's forests, plus annual allotments provided by nearby villages, which often virtually obliterated their community forest lands.⁷ Given this lively commerce centered on Kronach,

⁴ Georg Hummel, "Kronach und die Frankenwaldflösserei," in *Das Bayerland, Illustrierte Halbmonatschrift für Bayerns Land und Volk*, Bayerland Verlag: München, 1929.

⁵ The Chronicles report that one of Kronach's sawmills (the *Bergmühle*) had fallen into disrepair in 1735, but the *Bürgermeister* Johann Georg Wagner proposed to have it rebuilt, which was approved by the city administration and the residents.

⁶ There is a record from 1715 in the Chronicles referring to a Johann Jörg Wagner, one of four owners of saw-mills in Kronach, who complained about their tax burden of having to provide lumber to the Treasury Office (*Rentkammer*) in Bamberg, to be used for the construction of a new royal residence. The mill owners had been providing this lumber for many years (since 1605), even when it was no longer required, but the Treasury Office continued to demand back payments for it.

⁷ Vol. 6 of the Chronicles.

one can imagine that there were many wagon-makers and teamsters plying their trade there from the earliest times.

The modern editor of the Chronicles took note of the many influential members of the Wagner families in Kronach. The earliest reference was to Jacob Wagner, who lived in the late 1300s (in fact, that makes him one of the earliest references to the Wagner surname in all of Germany!). He was wealthy and upon his death his wife Barbara inherited his extensive fortune and became a renowned benefactress for charities. In 1414 the Chronicles mention that she endowed a hospital. She made other large donations throughout her life. A plaque commemorating her generosity was installed in one of the churches in Bamberg.

Several Wagners were closely associated with the Prince-Bishop's estates and the military garrison at the Rosenberg Castle. In 1495 the Chronicles refer to Claus (Nicolaus) Wagner, who was the *Hofman auff dem Rosenhoff*, the administrator of the Rosenberg estate. In the early 1700s Johann Franz Wagner became *Armamentari Praefectus* (in charge of the armaments) at the castle. His name recurred regularly in the Chronicles until the 1750s, in which he was sometimes referred to as *Stück-Lieutenant* (in charge of artillery "pieces"). His son, Johann Lorenz, and grandson, Adam Philipp Ernst, followed in his footsteps. J. Lorenz was placed in charge of the military defenses of the Rosenberg Castle during the Napoleonic wars. His fame reached far and wide. Napoleon himself commented on the high level of competence of J. Lorenz Wagner. The modern editor of the Chronicles noted that this "exceptional family" of craftsmen included several armorers, gunsmiths, and cannoneers, as well as high-ranking officers in the military garrison at the castle.

Several Wagners were members of the city council (referred to as *Senators*), and they also served as *Bürgermeisters* of Kronach. One of the earliest was Johann Wagner, who served in that role in 1597. Erasmus Wagner (also known as "Wich") was the mayor in 1632, and he was the one who issued the memorandum to Wallenstein, detailing the damages that the city had suffered during the sieges by the Swedish and Saxon armies. The Chronicles note that Erasmus Wagner was murdered in 1635 by Ludwig Conrad from Thüringen, who himself was killed later that same day by outraged local citizens while he was attending a wedding in Kronach. Erasmus was described as an "innocently white" (*unschuldiger weiss*) victim.⁸

In 1670, Johann Wagner, originally from Zeyern, purchased the first and oldest *Gasthof* (inn) in Kronach, known as *zum Schwarzen Adler* (at the Black Eagle), which had existed there since the 15th century. The *Gasthof* remained in the hands of the Wagner family for most of the 18th century, so it became known to locals simply as *der Wagner'sche Hof* (the Wagner Hof). Johann also owned the

⁸ The reference to the murder of Erasmus Wagner is in vols. 5 & 6 of the Chronicle.

Rotlederer von Zeyern Haus (he may have given the house this name, since he was from Zeyern, and his original trade may have been a "leather tanner"). This Gasthof was also a brewery and a tavern.



His son, Johann Georg (born 1680) became the progenitor of one of the “noble” Wagner families in Kronach – bolstered, no doubt, by the wealth brought in from operating the *Gasthof* and brewery. He was referred to in the records with a litany of titles, such as *nobilis et ornatissimus Dominus* (a “noble and most highly ornamented lord,” which probably denoted persons who were knighted by the Prince-Bishop of Bamberg), and *Magister, Senator hujatis, Tutor Ecclesia Primais* (Master teacher, council-member here, teacher of Church doctrine). He kept accumulating titles throughout his life. He inherited the family *Gasthof* in 1722, and that year he also became *Bürgermeister*. His son, Johann Georg Ignatius (born 1718), carried on this tradition (note that their given names grew in proportion to their titles!), and he was referred to in various ways, such as *Nobilisae Doctiss Dmus* (a Noble Lord of Doctrine) and *Hudiiy Provinc. Assessor* (Provincial Tax Assessor here).

Another branch of the Wagner family that attained the highest distinction in Kronach was Johann Georg Franz “Salesius” (born 1709), and his descendants. More commonly he was referred to as “Franz Sales Wagner,” “Sales” or “Salesius.” He was a *Senator* (member of the town council), a *Ratsherr* (counselor), and a *Baumeister* (city planner). He served as *Bürgermeister* for 10 annual terms – in 1731, 1735, 1739, 1747, 1751, 1755, 1756, 1760, 1763, and 1769. He was knighted to the rank of *Senior* by decree of the Prince-Bishop. As befitting a man of his rank, he was involved in charitable activities. He was *Spitalpfleger* (hospital curator) and for 31 years, from 1741 to 1777, he “honorably and with renown” administered the hospital in the city. The prestige of Johann Georg Franz Sales Wagner is also shown by the multiple names bestowed on the members of his family; one of his daughters, for example, was named Eva Sabina Josepha Francisca. Multiple names for the children probably indicated that they had multiple sponsors as an honorific, selected from the wealthier families during the sacramental transitions of the life cycle (baptism, confirmation, First Holy Communion).

Some Wagners attended universities in the larger capitol cities and attained higher academic degrees. Johann Wagner from Kronach graduated from the Univ. of Leipzig in 1516. He may have been the same person as Fr. Johann Wagner, the first pastor of St. Johannis church in Kronach, who died in 1540. Johann Nicolaus Wagner (born 1645) was another renowned learned person from Kronach. He may have been the same person as Johann Wagner from Kronach who was a Logician at the Univ. of Bamberg 1690–91. Paul Franz Wagner (son of “Salesius”) was a graduate of the *Akademie* in 1764 and also achieved a noted academic reputation. Johann Jacob Erhard Wagner (1772–1825) studied at the Univ. of Bamberg and became a Doctor of Theology, a Professor of Dogmatics, a Lyzeal Professor for Bible Interpretation and Oriental languages, and served as the Secretary for the Prince-Bishop at the Cathedral.

At least one member of the Wagner family in Kronach became a renowned artist. Johann Friedrich Wagner (born 1756) was a sculptor who worked in wood, stone, alabaster, ivory, and metal. Several of his carved altar-

pieces, done in the classical Rococo style, are preserved today in churches throughout Bavaria.

In addition to these persons of wealth and distinction, we should also note that the Wagner family has the dubious distinction of having two known victims from the sieges of the city in the Thirty Years' War -- "Hanss" Wagner was shot in his house during an attack by the invading Saxon and Swedish army in 1633, and he was buried in the city on Feb. 4, 1633; four months later Margaretha Wagner was also killed during an attack and she was buried on June 17, 1633.

Although I was able to extract most of the Wagner references in the old records, sorting out the maze of relationships was not an easy task. One problem was that the first name "Johann" was extremely popular in Kronach during the 18th century. It was a Catholic custom at that time for infants to be given the first name of their baptismal sponsor (names were not arbitrarily selected as they are today). Sometimes the godfather's adopted name was the second name in a compound form, such as Johann Georg, Johann Jacob, Johann Heinrich, or Johann Friedrich. Since there were many Johanns serving as godfathers, the frequency of this name grew over time. By the 1750s my estimate is that well over half the males in the city had the first name Johann, usually in a compound form. It's possible that the popularity of this name was enhanced by the fact that the parish church in the city was "St. Johannis" and the people tended to use that as the all-purpose patron saint. Adding to the confusion, preferences for which of the compound names to use shifted over the course of the person's life -- in some records his first name was used, but in other (usually later) records his second name was used. As men grew older, there was a tendency to use only their second name (e.g., Johann Nicolaus in some cases might become Nicolaus in the records).

The maze of Wagner family lines became so convoluted that it was apparent that the people and the parish priests also had difficulty keeping them straight. In order to distinguish the family lines, some resorted to secondary surnames - such as "Lenis," "Wich," "Sales" (*Salesius* in Latin), and "Hörnlein" - which most likely derived from the mother. In a few cases the surname Wagner was dropped altogether in the records and replaced by the alternate maternal name. For example, the index to the church books alerts the reader that "Johann Wagner" was also known as "Johann Wagner Wich," and sometimes he was listed simply as "Johann Wich;" likewise, Erasmus Wagner the *Bürgermeister* was also known as "Wich." It's likely that in these cases, the maternal family had some wealth and influence. Whatever the reason may have been, this introduced an almost *de facto* form of matrilineal inheritance for surnames in those instances!

Our Branch of the Wagner Family

Unfortunately, it is a rather long step down from some of the noble and "Most Highly Honored and Decorated" Wagner families in Kronach to the

relatively mundane lives of our own Wagner ancestors. Working backwards in time, we know from the marriage records in the Rhineland Pfalz region of our ancestor, Franz Wagner, that he was from “Kronach near Bamberg.” The marriage record in 1792 with his first wife, Margaretha Karmann in Mannheim gives us a vital clue because it states that his parents were Christopher Wagner and Anna Maria “Hausenbayer” (as we shall see, this was not her surname but rather a statement that her family resided in Bavaria). The marriage record with Franz’s second wife, Eva Würth, states only that he was from Kronach and it describes him as a common laborer. Eva Würth was the daughter of a swine-herder in Insheim, and she was born in 1755 (further details will be given when we reach that chapter of the family history in Rhineland Pfalz). So, given all these clues, we know where Franz was from, we know the names of his parents, we know his general occupation, and it is reasonable to surmise that his birth date approximated 1755.

When I visited the Archbishop’s Archive in Bamberg, I extracted all records (birth, baptisms, marriages, and deaths) for the surname Wagner in Kronach between the years 1617 (the earliest records) and 1761 (the point when I left off recording). Fortunately for us, the name “Franz” was not popular at that time in Kronach. There were only three candidates named Franz born during those years. Two of the candidates, Paul Franz and Franz Joseph Wagner, could be eliminated because neither of their parents were named Christopher and Anna Maria. Both were born into wealthy and noble families in Kronach and it is very unlikely that they would have ended up as a common laborer, marrying the daughter of a swine-herder in Rhineland Pfalz.⁹ Finally, both had compound names and Franz was not their primary and sole name.

The third candidate was clearly our ancestor: **Franz Wagner**, born Dec. 20, 1754, the son of **Christopher Wagner**, a wagon-driver or coachman (*Auriga*) and his legal wife **Maria Puttenhorn**. The parental first names match what is shown in Franz’s later marriage record in 1792, his year of birth (1754) closely matches that of his second wife Eva (1755), and his status as a common tradesman is appropriate.

What data are available on Franz’s parents? Franz’s baptismal record states his mother’s name as **Maria Puttenhorn**. She was from the village of

⁹ (1) **Paul Franz Wagner**, born Aug. 5, 1748, the son of **Johann Georg Franz “Salesius” Wagner**, the *Senator, Ratsherr, and Dominus* (member of the city council, judge, and Lord) who graduated from the *Akademie* in 1764. Paul Franz attended an academic Academy, and he was referred to in the Chronicles only by his first name “Paul” (the modern compiler of the city Chronicles added “Franciscus” in brackets after his name). (2) **Franz Joseph Wagner**, born Mar. 22, 1755, son of **Johann Georg Ignatius Wagner**, the wealthy provincial assessor and *nobilis et ornatissimus Dominus* (“Noble and Most Highly Decorated Lord”).

Maynrod (modern Mainroth) south of Kronach.¹⁰ There is another occurrence in the *Staatsarchiv* of Bamberg– in 1706, **Ottilia Puttenhorn**, a baker’s widow from Königsfeld, she was married to Georg Friedrich, a baker from Kulmbach, he had to promise to become a Catholic.¹¹ Ottilia was quite possibly a relative of Maria Puttenhorn, perhaps an aunt or even her mother. “Puttenhorn” is an unusual surname and it doesn’t occur in standard internet searches. All three of the towns mentioned in these records are close to each other. Mainroth is about eight miles south of Kronach, Kulmbach is about 13 miles south of Kronach, and Königsfeld is about 25 miles southwest toward Bamberg. *Puttenhorn* is a dialect term for “angel’s horn” (i.e., the type where you make a “pfuu” sound to blow it), so the origin of the surname probably referred to a trumpet player or maker. The surname “Horn” also occurs more frequently in the church books of Kronach, and all of those references are to families in the *Land* (the smaller villages in the district, such as Mainroth), rather than to the *Stadt* (the city of Kronach itself).

How do we explain the difference between Maria’s maiden name “**Puttenhorn**,” shown on Franz’s baptismal record, and the reference to her as **Anna Maria “Hausenbayer”** shown in Franz’s first marriage record? The answer is that *Hausenbayer* was not a surname, but rather a description. *Hausenbayer* literally means “dwelling in” (*hausen*) Bavaria (*Bayern*). When Franz became married in 1792 in Rohrbach (a village near Speyer in the Pfalz on the west bank of the Rhine), he probably provided only his parents’ first names – Franz and Anna Maria – and since the priest didn’t know Anna Maria’s maiden name, he simply wrote that she was from a family dwelling in Bavaria.

Concerning Franz’s father, Christopher, there is only one person in all the records from Kronach whose name and dates fit the possible parameters – **Johann Christopher**, who was baptized in Kronach on April 23, 1723, the son of **Mattheus Wagner** and **Anna Catherine Schmidt**. Given this year of birth, there would be a 31 year difference in age between Johann Christopher and his son,

¹⁰ Mainroth is a small village, today with 514 inhabitants, located near the Main river. It may be significant that one of the main cross streets in Mainroth is “*Wagner Gasse*” (Wagner Alley). Mainroth derives its name from “Red Main.” The Main river has two tributaries, the northern “White Main” flows from the Fichtel mountains (*Fichtelgebirge*) and the longer southern branch which flows from the Franconian Jura mountains, it is known as the “Red Main” because it picks up much clay during the rain season. The two tributaries merge near Kulmach, which about 5 miles from Mainroth.

¹¹ *Staatsarchiv Bamberg, Akten und Bände* Nr. 2404, 1706. The surname “Horn” by itself is quite ancient, going back to early Medieval times. It had various derivations, such as a musical instrument, animal horn which was used to make combs, pins, and other small items, or residents on the bend of a river.

Franz, which would be appropriate. All other instances of persons with the name Christopher Wagner in the church records are either too young or too old.

Christopher Wagner's father, Mattheus, was married the first time to a woman named Margaret (her maiden name was not stated) and they had a daughter, Regina, baptized on Sept. 22, 1710. At some point during the next 12 years Margaret died and Mattheus remarried to Anna Catherine Schmidt on Nov. 3, 1722. In that second marriage record he is referred to as a "widower," and Anna as a "chaste virgin," which was standard description for women at their first marriage. Their first son was Johann Christopher, born on April 23, 1723. His godfather was Johann Christoph Mayer. They had two other sons, Johann Andreas in 1726 and Johann Martin in 1730. In these baptismal records Mattheus is simply referred to as a citizen (*Civis*) of Kronach, and his occupation is not given. There are no clear links in the church records or in the Chronicles for later marriages, baptisms, or deaths associated with Christopher, Andreas or Martin Wagner; nor are there any additional records for Mattheus Wagner, so we cannot trace him back any further than his first marriage in 1710. There is no evidence that our earliest ancestor, Mattheus, was related to the other Wagner families in the city – although it seems likely that he was. If I were to pursue the ancestor quest back any further, my hunch would be to look at the cluster of Wagner families that derived from the nearby village of Neuses. Mattheus may well have been born there in the late 1600s.

Summary: Earliest Records for our Wagner Family in Kronach

Mattheus Wagner

Probably born in the late 1680s. His first marriage was to a woman named **Margaret**. One child is listed in the church records:

Regina Dorothea Wagner, bapt. Sept. 22, 1710.

His second marriage was Nov. 3, 1722 to **Anna Catherine Schmidt**; marriage record refers to Mattheus as a "citizen" of Kronach and a "widower;" Anna Catherine as a "virgin." Three children from this second marriage:

Johann Christopher Wagner, bapt. April 23, 1723.

His godfather was Johann Christopher Mayer.

Johann Andreas Wagner, bapt. Nov. 29, 1726.

Johann Martin Wagner, bapt. Jan. 24, 1730.

J. Christopher Wagner

Son of Mattheus. He married **Maria Puttenhorn** on Feb. 4, 1753. He was listed as an *Auriga*, a Latin word which means a carter or wagon driver, and a resident of Kronach. The only child listed from that marriage is **Franz**, born and bapt. Dec. 20, 1754.

Christophorus Wagner | 24. *Stupus. Opul: est honestus Adoles: cum Virg Maria
 Puttenhornin for. Maynrod. Testes Andreas Schmitt
 & Michael Langott ratorij Civis.*

(above) Christopher Wagner, [Feb. 4, 1753], an honorable [legitimately born] youth, was married here [Kronach] to the virgin Maria Puttenhorn from Maynrod. Witnesses were Andreas Schmitt and Michael Langott, tailor and citizen.

Franciscus Wagner | 25. *Stupus nat: & bapt: Pater Christophorus Wagner Civis
 & Auriga. Mater Maria Puttenhornin. Compab: Franciscus
 Kestel Adolescentia*

(above) Franciscus [Franz] Wagner, [Dec. 20, 1754], was born and baptized here [Kronach], father Christopher Wagner, citizen and coachman [Auriga], mother Maria Puttenhorn, godfather Franz Kestel, a youth [unmarried].